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UNCLAS KATHMANDU 002245

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR SA/INS, LONDON FOR POL/GURNEY, NSC FOR MILLARD

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: NEPAL: MAOISTS KILL ARMY BRIGADIER GENERAL

REF: (A) KATHMANDU 1648

1. Summary. On November 15, Royal Nepal Army (RNA) Brigadier General Sagar Bahadur Pandey was killed after a Maoist-laid improvised explosive device (IED) detonated under his vehicle in Makwanpur District, south of Kathmandu. Pandey is the highest-ranking military official to be killed during the seven-year-long insurgency. It remains unclear whether the Maoists intentionally targeted General Pandey or whether he was a target of opportunity. End Summary.

2. On November 15 at approximately 1430 hours, an improvised explosive device (IED) detonated under an army vehicle, killing Brigadier General Sagar Bahadur Pandey, his wife, and three other soldiers. The incident occurred in Makwanpur District, near the old highway that winds through the hills south from the Kathmandu Valley to the lowlands, or Terai. Earlier that day, General Pandey had visited a military ammunitions factory and was on his way to visit a second factory when the incident occurred.

3. According to the Royal Nepal Army (RNA), General Pandey and his wife were riding in the second vehicle of a convoy of three large army trucks. The IED reportedly was triggered directly underneath the second vehicle. Army sources also indicate that the IED was not recently planted and was remotely-triggered, e.g., not triggered by the impact of the vehicles.

4. Pandey was promoted to Brigadier General only four months ago and had been serving as the Director for Military Material Manufacturing. RNA sources have indicated that Pandey was an engineer by training and responsible for developing Nepal's "Tora Bora" system for dropping mortar rounds from helicopters.

5. Comment. Brigadier General Pandey is the highest-ranking RNA official, following the death of Colonel Kirin Basnet in August (reftel), to be killed by the Maoists during the seven-year-long insurgency. However, it remains unclear whether the Maoists knew that the General was part of the convoy or whether they attacked the trucks solely because of their military association. In either case, General Pandey's death is likely to alarm many RNA senior officers, who typically travel with security details. It also will be a shock to the Nepalese elite, of which Brigadier General Pandey most decidedly was a member. His father was a former Ambassador to India and his brothers are influential leaders in hydro-power development, banking, and in the RNA. General Pandey was a close and long-time contact of this Embassy. Embassy DAO soon will provide further details and analysis of this incident. End Comment.

MALINOWSKI